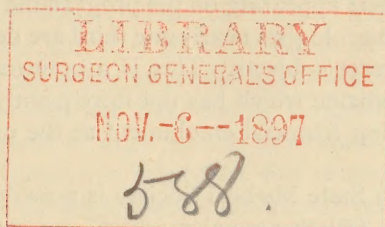


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WOMAN AND HER DISEASES V/S. GYNÆCOLOGY.*

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In nothing is the trend of modern progress more strongly indicated than in the well-nigh universal demand for the recognition of prophylaxis as a factor in all efforts for the betterment of vital conditions. Take, for an example, the programmes of the many conventions of medical societies now being held in different parts of the country, and compare them with those of a few years ago.

Then we had title after title relating to new operations and improvement in surgical technique. Often mechanical devices monopolized the attention of some of our best workers, and the atmosphere was rife with surgical activities and redolent of the fumes of newly discovered anæsthetics and antiseptics. The man with the feeble protest against radicalism was ingloriously sat upon and silenced, and with some reason; for without the hardy battling of our pioneers, and the unanimous and enthusiastic support of their followers, there could have been no such advance as we can boast in our knowledge of disease and its treatment. But now, as is usual after any season of great and prolonged activity, there is coming in a period of transition. We have operations to answer all the ordinary demands of suffering humanity, and ample surgical armamentarium for their performance. What follows? Look at our present programmes and see. Instead of essays on treatment, we have now studies in prevention; instead of cures, prophylaxis; out of the en-

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tire number of papers appearing on the programme of this meeting of representative gynæcologists nearly one third are devoted to the consideration of abstract subjects. This is a noteworthy showing for that branch of medicine which has not infrequently suffered the opprobrium of seeking financial emolument at the expense of Nature and humanity.

The Wisconsin State Medical Society is now devoting the entire proceedings of its fiftieth annual meeting—a very important anniversary, by the way—to preventive medicine. The sections keep their specialistic individuality as usual, but from start to finish the speakers treat of hygiene, sanitation, and prevention. This is not alone true of medicine. In secular science the study of sociology has taken first rank. Our popular and progressive universities have established departments of hygiene; and studies in biology, chemistry, and physiology are all linked with the wider interest in the new sanitation. Philanthropy is no longer content to dole out bread and clothing to the hungry and naked. She demands to know the causes of the pauper's decadence, and that those causes be eliminated from prevailing social conditions. She concedes that it is better to prevent evil than to do battle with its effects; that it is better to form a citizen than to reform him. And in this she has taken the cue from medicine, which has ever insisted that it is not only better but easier to prevent disease than to cope with its consequences; for there is no doubt that the accession of interest by intelligent people in this subject has been due to the influence of medical men. Notwithstanding the fact that the doctor sometimes ranks in public estimation with the plumber as a monument of greed, it is incontestably true that his best efforts are constantly given to the cause of public health and the elimination of those diseases which are supposed to be his bread and butter. But no reform ever came without self-sacrifice. The skilled mechanic who invents a labor-saving machine throws himself and his fellows out of work for a time, but he makes the race his debtor. So it is with the scientist in medicine. His constant study has been the betterment of humanity physically. For long this led him mainly to a consideration of the elaborating and perfecting of modes of treatment until he seemed to have reached the highest plane attainable in therapeutics.

But, still unsatisfied and ambitious of more complete victory, he turns now to attack the enemy from another direction, as the

Egyptians thought to exterminate the hosts of Israel, in the cradle. This is prophylaxis, and it is to our relation as gynæcologists to this science that I ask a few moments' consideration. I have called my paper *Woman and her Diseases vs. Gynæcology* not because I have any indictment to urge against this branch of medicine, but because I hoped thereby to emphasize one thought; and this, that in our devotion to the experimental and purely scientific side of our art, we must not forget that we are dealing not with cold facts or interesting phenomena in wood or stone, but with the highest of human interests. We must take part in the present crusade against prevailing evil conditions, and no mean part, but as conservators of health in women take front rank among social and sanitary reformers. None know so well the needs of woman as the profession who, for the better part of this century, have made the study of female anatomy and female disease, its ætiology, pathology, and treatment, the chief consideration, and to this profession should the public turn for enlightenment upon all that concerns woman's health. There is room for abundant effort in this field as in the field of mechanical experiment. The amount of ignorance of Nature's requirements displayed by the average woman, intelligent enough on other points, is appalling. Woman's sphere has widened of late, until now her outlook is as broad as man's. The few restrictions to her liberty which remain as reminders of her narrow sphere in the past will probably soon disappear, and all barriers to her future progress be removed. How is she meeting these new opportunities with their responsibilities? Entering the race with man, does she equip herself intelligently for the trial? Does she first make herself free as he of all that would hamper and impede? Do not look for an answer to our few higher educational centers, where co-education demands for girls the same routine and regimen of training as for boys. These are the exceptions. But look about you in the streets, in the offices, in the great commercial and social centers, and find the average woman. The stenographer sitting all day at her instrument, the saleswoman and workgirl standing through long hours at her nerve-exhausting occupation, the business woman and the shopper, tramping up and down the hard, dirt-laden streets. Are not their bodies, upon whose well-being the success of all their efforts depends, outraged by compliance with the dictates of arbitrary fashion in food, dress, and habit? In the matter of dress no attention is paid to the original and normal contour of

the female form. Fashion has set up an unnatural standard of beauty, and one must conform to it at any cost. Upon the compressed and constricted waist are hung heavy weights of the manufacturer's fabrics, cotton, silk, and woollen, dragging down and permanently injuring the viscera, which demand a delicate and uniform adjustment, *plus* motility. The chest and shoulders are run into molds curiously constructed of various materials—one day fur and the next some airy gauze—stiffened with whalebones to the utter immolation of the function of heart and lungs, stomach, liver, and other abdominal and pelvic viscera. The head, ears, neck, and throat go covered or uncovered, without regard to the suitability of the weather; and the problem of high heels or low, big hats or little bonnets, is settled by *L'Art de la Mode*, and not by the mandates of reason. The food is chosen with regard solely to the capricious appetite of the eater, and without any reference to the law of demand and supply, or the particular need of the individual organism. The constricted and dislocated stomach is filled with salads, confections, condiments, and iced or effervescent drinks *ad libitum*, and expected to do its whole duty of assimilation and nourishment. The nerves and vital powers are tried exceedingly from morning until night in responding to the demands of our modern artificial civilization, and then are denied that share of "tired Nature's sweet restorer" which the law of compensation ought to insure. In the education of the growing girl the conditions are no better. In the public schools girls are still plodding many times a day up and down long flights of stairs, the nearer the critical stage of maturity the more stairs to mount. At this period, when Nature is supremely concerned with the development of the generative organs, in our public schools and workshops girls of twelve to sixteen years of age are still housed up in overcrowded, ill-ventilated apartments, sustaining the working hours of the day upon food into which little of real nutritive value enters, when they should be breathing free draughts of vitalizing oxygen, exercising their growing muscles in unobstructed sunshine, and eating food rich in nutritive and assimilable qualities.

Who shall insist upon a better school *régimé* for the period of puberty if we who know how many evils result from the present faulty environments do not? This is where again we should remember that the "ology" is not the whole of our specialty. We know all about the pelvic organs of women; we can teach our

students how to cope with serious conditions, to treat grave lesions, and to do brilliant operations; but woman must be more than the material upon which to exploit skill in perfecting radical and often mutilating operations. Our interest in her constitution must not be centered alone in its pathology, but must extend to the developmental period when evil influences exist to determine later suffering and disease.

There has been an indication in some quarters, which we can not but deprecate as leading away from the broad and dignified position which ought to be occupied by the professor of diseases of women, to a narrowing of his opportunities and a belittling of the esteem in which he aims to be held. This is a tendency among certain gynæcologists to affiliation with surgery and a severing of the old connection with obstetrics and pædiatrics. This ought not to be, and, in fact, such a union of interests can not be effectively consummated. To accentuate the surgical significance of gynæcology is to give countenance to a belief already too widely credited that woman's generative organs are doomed when once she has consulted a specialist. And while it seems plausible that a man who has given his entire time to surgery and mechanical technique should be better qualified to perform a capital operation of any nature, this is not strictly true in pelvic and gynæcological surgery.

Nothing but long training and every-day experience in the pelvic cavity can qualify the operator to meet its problems, and the surgeon and diagnostician must be one and the same, so often the diagnosis can not be complete or procedure fully determined until the operation is well under way.

And to be a good diagnostician in the diseases of women one must know as much about women as about disease; as much about environment and social and domestic condition as about pelvic lesions; as much about causes as results. Therefore the affinity of our specialty is naturally with obstetrics and pædiatrics, since with the exception of extremely rare congenital malformations, specific infections, and unusual traumatisms, nearly all gynæcological diseases have their origin in the physical errors of childhood and puberty and the accidents or mismanagements of pregnancy, labor, and the puerperium. It remains for the gynæcologist to co-operate with the pædiatrician, with the general practitioner, with the family, and with the public in bringing about an improvement in the environment of our girls from the cradle up.

I am convinced we have but to take the initiative to receive the hearty indorsement of these others.

Not until the ophthalmologists boldly invaded the schools with their demands were the young eyes of this nation rescued from the evils of the old system of lighting, and all reforms in heating and ventilation that have been developed out of public interest in these matters have originated with specialists.

In view of these facts, then, we can well spare a little time from the work of advancing the concrete advantages of the specialty—those things we are most prone to think of as gynæcology, the details of treatment, medical, mechanical, and surgical—and join issues with the general symposium on prophylaxis, and do not less brilliant work in forwarding the abstract good of humanity as it is bound up in the welfare of woman.

To express these random thoughts more tersely, I would offer this summary:

1. As gynæcologists we must recognize and exercise the rising interest in a medical science which shall be preventive rather than curative.

2. Our affiliations should be with the general practitioner and obstetrician rather than with the specialist in surgery, who often lacks the special training necessary to an appreciation of the many disease-manifestations in woman, their ætiology and prophylaxis.

3. As we have long made a study of the pathology and ætiology of women's diseases, and as we know that whatever may be acquired can be prevented, our specialists are best qualified to lead in the movement for the reform of all conditions detrimental to the health of modern women.

4. To repeat, my title is not in any way an indictment against our great division of the science of medicine, but an attempt to bring forward the claim of the living human interests of woman's life in all its issues as opposed to a colder, more purely scientific, and more mechanical interest in the pathology of the female pelvic organs.

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